

DRAFT

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the Inter-Regional Meeting to Review
Implementation of the Programme of Action on the Sustainable
Development of Small Island Developing States

General Debate in High-Level Segment

UNESCO, 13 January 2005

Mr /Madame Chairperson

Heads of Delegations,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before addressing the main theme of this meeting, let me tell you that, like all of you, UNESCO has been appalled by the huge loss of life and massive destruction caused by the Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004. We are joining with others in contributing to the immediate international response to this terrible disaster; at the same time, we see an urgent need to learn appropriate lessons that will inform our long-term action.

For UNESCO, the key lessons are focused on, first, the need to put in place effective early warning systems like the one we have established in the Pacific region and, second, the need to have well-developed educational and public awareness programmes that prepare people and empower them with knowledge and understanding. Both are needed: to warn without preparing the response when confronted by an emergency is no help at all.

UNESCO has been advocating in favour of an early warning system in the Indian Ocean and other regions of the world since the risk of tsunamis exists in varying degrees in all oceans and coastal seas. This is why UNESCO is now calling for the establishment of early warning systems not only in the Indian Ocean but also in the

Caribbean and the Mediterranean and for their reinforcement in the SW Pacific. Indeed, we are actively promoting the setting up of a global early warning system for tsunamis that would provide an integrated international framework for establishing regional systems and responsible national centres and facilities.

The countries and organizations presently dealing with the immediate impact of the 26 December disaster are, at the same time, participants in the Indian Ocean Global Ocean Observing System. This regional initiative, established by an agreement signed in Mauritius in 2002, has much potential as a framework for moving towards comprehensive ocean measurement and forecasting in the Indian Ocean.

We are humbled and honoured by the requests made to UNESCO and its IOC to provide the needed leadership in coordinating the several initiatives that are emerging. As a concrete response to the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, we are helping to set up technical post-event assessment missions. In addition, in light of the Jakarta Declaration issued on 6 January 2005 that called for a regional early warning system in the Indian Ocean, we will first convene in early March in Paris a technical meeting of experts from the interested Member States and relevant regional and international organizations in order to harmonize different early warning initiatives, define the scope and characteristics of a global tsunami warning system, and establish a single scheme, with particular attention to those regions I

mentioned above. Later that month, UNESCO will, in collaboration with ISDR, WMO and other partners, call an Indian Ocean Tsunami Regional Conference at which Member States would hopefully agree on their roles within that regional tsunami warning system.

Given the particular vulnerability of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the rationale for establishing such systems in the Indian Ocean and elsewhere is obvious. That rationale is driven, first and foremost, by concern for basic human security and also by the need to build forms of sustainable development that are alert to Nature's threats.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO has long had projects specifically focused on aspects of the sustainable development of SIDS. Over the last decade, we have been pleased to contribute to the Barbados Programme of Action and, over the last 18 months, we have participated actively in the implementation review process.

In doing so, we have been listening carefully to what small island developing states are saying, what they perceive the issues to be and what help they need. We have taken good note of shifts in emphasis regarding issues agreed upon in Barbados in 1994, in such fields as sea-level change, freshwater resources, renewable energy, natural disasters, coastal and marine resources, biodiversity and tourism.

UNESCO recognises the need to utilise modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to create and reinforce partnerships of various kinds. A number of interesting synergies involving UNESCO have taken shape recently and I hope they will receive fresh impetus through this week's deliberations in Mauritius.

We have followed with much interest the evolving strategy for the further implementation of the SIDS Programme of Action. UNESCO warmly welcomes the recognition of such considerations as cultural identity, cultural diversity and cultural heritage, education and various societal issues (including the HIV/AIDS epidemic) as crucial components of sustainable development.

A major challenge is to devise ways through which SIDS can gain greater social and economic benefits from their cultural strengths, such as music and other cultural expressions, traditional skills and knowledge, and cultural heritage. To facilitate the latter, a special programme established at the World Heritage Centre will provide enhanced assistance to SIDS in the preparation of nominations to UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Education and training, the key modalities of capacity-building, are also high on UNESCO's agenda in regard to SIDS. This very month sees the onset of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. As lead agency for the Decade, UNESCO hopes that SIDS will participate actively in this initiative and use the Decade as a

means for changing perceptions and behaviours in respect to sustainable development. Meanwhile, in regard to the transmission and sharing of information, we also encourage SIDS to engage with the ongoing debates associated with the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In contributing towards a new vision and commitment for small islands, UNESCO's own actions will continue to be rooted in its fields of competence: education, culture, the basic and natural sciences, the social and human sciences, and communication. These actions will clearly need to be reviewed in the light of the outcomes of this week's meeting taking place here in Mauritius.

As reaffirmed in the preamble to the Draft Strategy, sustainable development is best achieved through the adoption of integrated and holistic approaches at all levels. Our shared challenge is to build capacities and strengthen cooperation as we promote problem-solving actions that cut across societal sectors and institutional specialisms. Collectively, we need to mobilize key actors and constituencies (including youth) in programmes and actions that are culturally sensitive and scientifically sound, that take advantage of the opportunities opened by modern ICTs, and that promote the exchange of information and experience within and between regions and between islands of different affiliations.

For its part, UNESCO will continue to mainstream such considerations in our various programmes and projects and in the work of the field offices serving Island Member States. Furthermore, we will continue to provide mechanisms that focus attention across the Organization on the special problems of SIDS and help to promote partnerships and cooperation with other bodies, within and outside the United Nations system.

We have heard much about the special vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States and the particular challenges that they face. At the same time, there is also need to stress the very special positive characteristics and strengths of small island nations and communities: their extraordinary capacity for adaptation and innovation; their proven determination and capability to overcome many adversities; their role as one of the world's front-line zones for addressing the challenges of sustainable development and sustainable living; and the recognized importance of maintaining solidarity among themselves while treasuring their diversity.

Thus, while there remains much work to be done, there are many opportunities to be seized. Be assured that UNESCO will be at your side as you address these tasks.

Thank you.